

# Health warning on low-energy bulbs

The Press Association

The Government's planned switchover from traditional light-bulbs to low-energy lighting could cause health problems for tens of thousands of people with skin conditions including eczema, experts have warned.

And there were warnings that consumers will have to take more care disposing of broken or expired low-energy bulbs in order to avoid contamination with the poisonous mercury they contain.

The Environment Agency acknowledged that both retailers and the authorities need to do more to inform the public about safe recycling of the new-style bulbs as they become more common.

The process of phasing out the conventional pear-shaped "incandescent" bulbs and replacing them with more energy-efficient fluorescent models begins this month and is due to be completed by 2011 as part of the UK's efforts to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions.

But Professor John Hawk, dermatology spokesman for the British Skin Foundation, warned that the new-style bulbs will cause problems for people with light-sensitive skin, some of whom are already unable to spend time in buildings with fluorescent strip lighting, like factories and hospitals.

Prof Hawk told BBC Radio 4's Today programme: "Fluorescent lights seem to have some sort of ionising characteristic where they affect the air around them.

"This does affect a certain number of people, probably tens of thousands of people in Britain, who are flared up just by being close to them.

"Certain forms of eczema - some of which are very common - do flare up badly anywhere near fluorescent lights, so these people have to just be around incandescent lights."

A much smaller number of patients with very severe light sensitivity are unable to tolerate exposure to the small amount of ultra-violet light given off by the new-style bulbs, he added.

There are a "significant number" of people in the UK who are already unable to visit or work in buildings with fluorescent lighting, said Prof Hawk, adding: "It is people who will have to be exposed to them in their homes that we are worried for, and I very strongly suggest that incandescent bulbs remain available for use in the home."